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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine the correspondence between the effects of task purposes and goal-setting strategies on preschoolers' unmonitored compliance, and their internal attributions for compliance. A total of 97 preschool children of 4-5 years of age participated in two 5-minute compliance tests that employed a resistance-to-distraction task, an experimenter-absent compliance test, and an experimenter-absent plus disinhibition statement compliance test. The three types of task purposes were: Learning; Performance Evaluation; and No Purpose. The two goal-setting strategies were: Child Sets Task Goals and Experimenter Sets Task Goals. Preschoolers who performed a task for supposed evaluation purposes spent more time than did preschoolers who performed the task for supposed learning purposes. Corresponding attributional findings indicated that preschoolers who performed a task for evaluation purposes also expressed greater preference for, or attributed greater intrinsic interest to, the requested task than did preschoolers performing the task for learning purposes. Results suggest that internal attributions may partially contribute to preschoolers' compliance, but attributional explanations alone are not sufficient for an understanding of the relationship between socialization techniques and preschoolers' compliance. (RH)

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Attributions and the Effects of Task Purpose and Goal Setting Strategies On Preschoolers' Compliance

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ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted to determine the correspondence between the effects of task purposes (Learning, Performance Evaluation, and No Purpose) and goal setting strategies (Child vs. Experimenter Sets Task Goals) on preschoolers' unmonitored compliance and their internal attributions for compliance. Ninety-seven 4-5-year-olds participated in two 5-minute compliance tests employing a resistance-to-distraction task, an Experimenter Absent (EA) and an Experimenter Absent + Disinhibition Statement (EA+DS) compliance test. Three measures of compliance were obtained, complete compliance (time spent on requested task), partial compliance (time spent resisting prohibited task, but not working on requested task), and complete noncompliance (time spent on prohibited activity). In general, Ss were more compliant, both completely and partially, during the EA than during the EA+DS compliance test. Across compliance tests, subjects in the Performance Evaluation conditions were more completely compliant and indicated greater intrinsic interest in the requested task than Ss in the Learning Purpose conditions. In general, girls were more completely compliant than boys, but there were no differences in their attributions for compliance. For the most part, Ss were more noncompliant during the EA+DS than during the EA compliance test. However, during the EA+DS compliance test, girls in the Performance Purpose/Experimenter Sets Goals condition spent less time engaging in the prohibited activity than Ss in the other

Experimenter Sets Goals conditions, including boys in the Performance Purpose/Experimenter Sets Goals condition. During the EA compliance test, females in the No Purpose/Child Sets Goals condition spent more time on the prohibited task than females in the No Purpose/Experimenter Sets Goals condition and than males in the No Purpose/Child Sets Goals condition. The noncompliance findings suggest that the provision of clear expectations may be necessary for preventing preschool girls from completely transgressing, especially when no reasons for engaging in the requested task are given. There were no attributional patterns paralleling the noncompliance findings. The results of the study suggest that internal attributions may contribute partially to preschoolers' compliance, but that attributional explanations alone are not sufficient for understanding the relationship between socialization techniques and preschoolers' compliance.

Attributions and the Effects of Task Purpose and Goal Setting Strategies On Preschoolers' Compliance

One goal of socialization is to influence children in such a way that desired behaviors persist even when no one is present to watch over them. Lepper (1983) has proposed that the most effective socialization strategies are those that are "minimally sufficient" to produce desired behaviors without resulting in external attributions for the behaviors. Effective strategies are proposed as those that result in internal motivations that will guide behavior over the long-run. Hoffman's (1977, 1983) theory of moral internalization also highlights the importance of internal motivations.

Directive or power assertive strategies, high levels of close surveillance, and external rewards and punishments have been found to lead to noncompliant behavior in unmonitored situations, and techniques such as reasoning and relatively nondirective instruction strategies have been found to lead to relatively compliant behavior in unmonitored situations (e.g., Bourg & Cohen, 1988; Bourg & Power, 1985, 1986; Chapman & Zahn-Waxler, 1982; Hoffman, 1970; Kuczynski, 1984; Pittman, Davey, Alafat, Wetherill, & Wirsul, 1980; Deci, Nezlek, & Shienman, 1984). Most of these findings have been explained from an attributional perspective. The directive/external techniques are thought to foster external attributions which undermine the child's subsequent intrinsic interest in a requested activity and

result in noncompliance when an external monitor is absent. Reasoning and relatively nondirective techniques are thought to foster internal motivations, which are thought to serve the child well in tests of unmonitored compliance. However, with only a few exceptions, behavioral measures of immediate and relatively long-term compliance are obtained, but measures of children's attributions for their compliance are usually not obtained in studies of compliance and internalization. In such cases, attributional explanations for compliance are inferences at best.

There has been some controversy about the role of attributions in the socialization of children. Maccoby (1983) has suggested that too much emphasis has been placed on the attribution process, and that theories and models of socialization requiring internal attributions for behaviors run the risk of contradicting some existing research findings (see Maccoby & Martin, 1983). She has also suggested that socialization agents' abilities to manipulate children's attributions have been exaggerated, and that externally manipulating attributions will not generally result in internalization.

To determine the extent to which attributions are involved in children's compliance, it is important to obtain both behavioral measures of compliance and measures of children's attributions for their compliance. If socialization strategies promoting internal attributions are necessary for unmonitored compliance, then strategies resulting in relatively high levels

of unmonitored compliance should also result in relatively high levels of internal attributions for compliance.

The purpose of the present experiment is to determine the effects of various task purposes and goal setting strategies on preschoolers' unmonitored compliance in a resistance-to-distraction task and on their attributions for compliance. The particular task purposes and goal setting strategies investigated here are based on naturally-occurring techniques used by actual mothers of preschoolers in a previous observational study employing a resistance-to-distraction procedure (Bourg & Power, 1985). The three types of task purposes are 1) Learning, 2) Performance Evaluation, and 3) No Purpose. The two goal setting strategies are 1) Child Sets Task Goals and 2) Experimenter Sets Task Goals. In this particular resistance-to-distraction task, subjects are requested to work on alphabet and number tracing sheets and are prohibited from watching a television located behind them. Behavioral measures of compliance are obtained in a test of unmonitored compliance and in a test of unmonitored compliance followed by a disinhibition statement designed to minimize potential external consequences for noncompliance (Kuczynski, 1983). The test of unmonitored compliance followed by the disinhibition statement is believed to be a more stringent test of compliance. Following the compliance tests, children are asked a series of questions designed to assess their attributions for their compliance. Of primary interest is whether or not children exposed to the task

purposes and goal setting strategies that are associated with relatively high levels of compliance are also more likely to make internal attributions for their compliance.

Method

Subjects

Ninety-seven 4-5-year-old children, 52 males and 45 females, attending preschools and day-care centers in the metropolitan area of Sacramento, California participated in the study.

Design

The study was a 3 X 2 X 2 X 2 (Task Purpose X Goal Setting X Gender X Compliance Test) mixed model randomized block design with the Compliance Test factor repeated. Task Purpose and Goal Setting were manipulated between subjects factors.

Procedure

Subjects were instructed to work on an alphabet and number tracing task and were prohibited from watching a nearby television displaying Winnie-the-Pooh cartoons. Subjects were tested individually on preschool/day-care premises. Males and females were randomly assigned separately to one of the six conditions presented below. There were approximately equal numbers of males and females in each condition.

Subjects assigned to the Learning Purpose/Child Sets Goals condition were told to complete as many tracing sheets as they could so they could learn to write letters and numbers and get ready for kindergarten. The same instructions were given to children in the Learning Purpose/Experimenter Sets Goals

condition, with the exception that they were told to finish all of the tracing sheets.

Children in the Performance Evaluation Purpose/Child Sets Goals condition were instructed to complete as many tracing sheets as they could so the experimenter could see how well they could trace letters and numbers. They were also told to do the best that they could. The same instructions were given to subjects in the Performance Evaluation Purpose/Experimenter Sets Goals condition, with the exception that they were told to finish all of the tracing sheets.

Those in the No Purpose/Child Sets Goals condition were simply told to trace the numbers and letters, and to complete as many tracing sheets as they could. Those in the No Purpose/Experimenter Sets Goals condition were told to trace the numbers and letters, and to finish all of the tracing sheets.

Each subject was presented with the instructions associated with his/her experimental condition and was then left alone for 5 minutes (Experimenter Absent compliance test). After the 5 minute Experimenter Absent compliance test, the experimenter returned to tell the child she would be away longer than she expected. In addition, condition instructions were repeated along with a disinhibition statement. In the disinhibition statement, the experimenter told the child that she would understand if the child did not work the whole time and that she would not be angry if the child watched the TV, but she either told the child to try to do as many tracing sheets as

he/she could (Child Sets Goals conditions) or to try to finish all of the tracing sheets (Experimenter Sets Goals conditions). The child was left alone for an additional 5 minutes (Experimenter Absent + Disinhibition Statement compliance test). Afterwards, a second experimenter asked the child questions from a 9-item questionnaire assessing attributions for working on the tracing task.

Interrater Reliability

Compliance was measured by the number of seconds each child spent tracing the letters and numbers. To assess interrater reliability, two raters who were blind to the purposes and hypotheses of the study independently measured the number of seconds in which a random selection of approximately 80% (79 Ss) of the subjects spent tracing the letters and numbers during the two compliance tests. The correlation between the values obtained from each rater was calculated to determine interrater reliability. This procedure was conducted for each compliance test. The Pearson *rs* were .93 and .97 for the Experimenter Absent and the Experimenter Absent + Disinhibition Statement compliance tests, respectively.

Noncompliance was measured by the number of seconds each child spent watching the television. Two additional raters who were also blind to the study's purpose and hypotheses independently measured the number of seconds in which a random selection of approximately 25% (24 Ss) of the subjects spent watching the television. The Pearson *rs* calculated on the values

obtained from each rater were .99 for the Experimenter Absent compliance test and .99 for the Experimenter Absent + Disinhibition Statement complilance test.

Results

Behavioral Measures Of Compliance

Complete Compliance. Complete compliance was measured by the amount of time subjects spent on the requested task, i.e., actually tracing the letters and numbers. The 3 X 2 X 2 X 2 (Task Purpose X Goal Setting X Gender X Compliance Test) mixed model ANOVA computed on the mean number of seconds on task for each condition revealed a Task Purpose main effect, F (2, 85) = 3.35, $p < .05$, a Gender main effect, F (1, 85) 4.25, $p < .05$, and a Compliance Test main effect, F (1,85) = 25.98, $p < .001$. Table 1 shows that children in the Performance Evaluation conditions spent more time on task than children in the Learning Purpose conditions (SNK, $p < .05$), girls spent more time on task than boys, and, across all conditions, subjects spent more time on task during the Experimenter Absent compliance test than during the Experimenter Absent + Disinhibition Statement compliance test.

Partial Compliance. Recall that subjects were requested to perform one task (tracing) and prohibited from engaging in another (watching TV). It may be that 4-5-year-olds believe they are at least somewhat compliant if they avoid engaging in a prohibited activity even though they are also not working on a requested task. Therefore, in addition to obtaining a measure of

complete compliance, we obtained a measure of complete noncompliance, which was the amount of time subjects spent watching the television. In addition, a measure of partial compliance was obtained for each compliance test by subtracting from 300 seconds (5 minutes) the number of seconds subjects spent tracing the letters and numbers and watching the TV. The 3 X 2 X 2 X 2 (Task Purpose X Goal Setting X Gender X Compliance Test) mixed model ANOVA computed on the partial compliance measure yielded a significant Compliance Test main effect, F (1, 84) = 60.86, $p < .001$. As was the case for the complete compliance measure, subjects spent more time being partially compliant during the Experimenter Absent compliance test (M = 140.52) than during the Experimenter Absent + Disinhibition Statement compliance test (M = 105.09).

Complete Noncompliance. The mean number of seconds spent watching TV for each condition was subjected to a 3 X 2 X 2 X 2 (Task Purpose X Goal Setting X Gender X Compliance Test) mixed model ANOVA. The analysis yielded a significant Compliance Test main effect, F (1, 84) = 65.06, $p < .001$, indicating that, for the most part, subjects spent more time watching the prohibited TV during the Experimenter Absent + Disinhibition Statement compliance test (M = 118.97) than during the Experimenter Absent compliance test (M = 58.42). However, the significant Task Purpose X Goals X Gender X Compliance Test interaction effect, F (2, 84) = 3.48, $p < .05$, requires us to qualify the interpretation of the Compliance Test main effect. The sources

of the interaction effect were determined by conducting post-hoc analyses of the simple interaction effects, simple main effects, and simple pairwise comparisons (SNKs).

The post-hoc analyses and the means presented in Table 2 indicated that for the Experimenter Absent compliance test, females in the No Purpose/Child Sets Goals condition spent more time watching TV than females in the No Purpose/Experimenter Sets Goals condition and than males in the No Purpose/Child Sets Goals condition (*ps* < .05).

An examination of Table 2 also indicates that for the Experimenter Absent + Disinhibition Statement compliance test, girls in the Performance Evaluation Purpose/Experimenter Sets Goals condition spent less time watching TV than the other groups of subjects in the Experimenter Sets Goals conditions (*ps* < .05).

Attribution Data

The attribution questionnaire is presented in the appendix. Questionnaire items were scored in the internal direction such that internal attributions were given a score of 1 and external attributions were given a score of 0. For question 9 (see appendix), a score of 1 was given when a subject indicated a preference for the tracing task, and a score of 0 was given when a subject indicated a preference for the TV. Uncodable, ambiguous, "neither," and "don't know" responses were treated as

missing values. The majority of the missing values were due to "don't know" responses.

A principal components analysis with a varimax rotation extracted four factor loadings from the attribution questionnaire, 1) Desirability, 2) Beneficiary, 3) Fear of Detection, and 4) Task Preference, or Relative Intrinsic Interest. Missing values were handled using the pairwise deletion procedure. Table 3 contains the factor loadings for each item of the questionnaire.

Factor scores were derived by dividing the sum of the scores on the individual items comprising a factor by the total number of items for that factor. Each factor score was subjected to a 3 X 2 X 2 (Task Purpose X Goal Setting X Gender) ANOVA. The number of cases excluded from these analyses because of missing data were 61, 41, 42, and 4 for the Desirability, Beneficiary, Fear of Detection, and Task Preference factors, respectively.

The only ANOVA to yield a significant finding was the one computed on the Task Preference factor. The analysis revealed a significant Task Purpose main effect, F (2, 81) = 3.34, $p < .05$. Paralleling the complete compliance findings, subjects in the Performance Evaluation conditions indicated greater liking, or intrinsic interest, for the tracing task, as opposed to the TV, than subjects in the Learning Purpose conditions (SNK, $p < .05$).

Discussion

Of all the measures of compliance and attributions, there was only one direct parallel between the patterns of compliance

levels and attributions for compliance. Preschoolers who perform a task for supposed evaluation purposes spend more time on the task than preschoolers who perform the task for supposed learning purposes. The corresponding attributional findings indicate that preschoolers performing a task for evaluation purposes also express greater preference for, or attribute greater intrinsic interest to, the requested task than preschoolers performing the task for learning purposes.

The above findings suggest that the internal attribution of intrinsic interest is associated with the relative effectiveness of using a performance evaluative versus a learning orientation for obtaining compliance from preschoolers. It may be that the performance evaluation technique leads to an internal motivation (i.e., intrinsic interest, or relative "liking" for the requested task), which in turn provides the child with the means to comply in the absence of an external monitor. Or, it may be that something else inherent in the performance evaluation technique leads the child to comply, and that the child's compliant behavior influences his/her verbal expression of intrinsic interest. Social psychologists investigating the attitude-behavior relationship have found that, depending on the conditions, there may or may not be consistency between expressed attitudes and behaviors, and that the influential direction of attitude-behavior relationships may vary across conditions (e.g., Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Kahle, 1984). Future research investigating whether the compliant behavior of preschoolers

performing a task for evaluation purposes is the result of an internalized "liking" for the task, or if the expressed intrinsic interest is a result of the compliant behavior (Shaban, personal communication, April, 1987), would provide useful information for theories of socialization and for the attribution-socalization controversy (e.g., Lepper, 1983; Maccoby, 1983).

Initially, it may seem surprising that a performance evaluation purpose is associated with high levels of compliant behavior and expressed intrinsic interest. However, Harackiewicz, Abrahams, & Wageman (1987) found that an anticipated performance evaluation with a task focus, as opposed to a social comparison focus, enhances 15-18-year-olds' intrinsic interest in a task (a word game), and is associated with thoughts about the task itself. Harackiewicz et.al. (1987) and others (Ames, 1984; Dweck, 1986) suggest that a performance evaluation with a task focus may encourage task involvement and actually prevent individuals from becoming concerned with external evaluation. The performance evaluation condition of the present study certainly had a task focus as opposed to a social comparison focus. And, the results indicate that the presentation of a performance evaluation task purpose does encourage task involvement, at least when presented to preschoolers.

But why does an anticipated performance evaluation result in greater compliance and intrinsic interest than a learning purpose rationale? An examination of condition instructions indicates

that, in comparison to the learning purpose instructions, the performance evaluation instructions are relatively concrete and provide individuals with a more immediate reason for working on the requested task. The experimenter said to the child, "I want to see how well you can trace letters and numbers. So do the best that you can." Implicit in those instructions is the notion that the experimenter will check the child's work to determine how well the child can trace letters and numbers now. The learning purpose instructions, on the other hand, are future oriented ("... will help you to learn to write letters and numbers. This will help you get ready for kindergarten."). The more immediate, performance evaluation instructions may be more comprehensible to preschoolers and, hence, more effective, than the more abstract, future oriented learning purpose instructions. Or, perhaps the relative immediacy of the performance evaluation holds more value for the preschool child than the more long-term, presumed benefit associated with the learning purpose instructions.

Although there is some correspondence between preschoolers' unmonitored compliance and intrinsic interest, the degree of correspondence between unmonitored compliance and attributions in the present study is not great enough to justify the sole or primary use of attributional explanations for compliance. Gender differences in compliance are evident. Preschool girls are more compliant than boys, but no differences in their attributions for compliance were found. Also, when preschool girls anticipate a

performance evaluation and are presented with definite expectations (Performance Evaluation/Experimenter Sets Goals condition), they are less likely to engage in a prohibited activity after they are told there will be no external consequences for noncompliance than preschool boys presented with the same information.

When they are not assured of the absence of external consequences for noncompliance and when no reasons for performing a requested task are presented, preschool girls who are allowed to set their own task completion goals (No Purpose/Child Sets Goals condition) transgress more than girls who are presented with definite expectations. They also transgress more than boys who are provided with no reasons, but who are allowed to set their own task completion goals. The provision of clear task expectations, even if externally set, seem important for preventing preschool girls from completely transgressing; this warrants further investigation.

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APPENDIX

ATTRIBUTION QUESTIONNAIRE FORM A

1. WHY DID YOU KEEP WORKING THE FIRST TIME THE LADY LEFT?
2. WHEN THE LADY LEFT THE FIRST TIME, DID YOU KEEP WORKING
   A) BECAUSE YOU WANTED TO?
   B) BECAUSE SHE WANTED YOU TO?
   C) NEITHER OF THOSE TWO REASONS
3. WHEN THE LADY LEFT THE FIRST TIME, DID YOU KEEP WORKING
   A) BECAUSE YOU THOUGHT THE LADY WOULD FIND OUT IF YOU WOULDN'T KEEP WORKING?
   B) BECAUSE YOU WANTED TO KEEP WORKING?
   C) NEITHER OF THOSE TWO REASONS
4. WHEN THE LADY LEFT THE FIRST TIME, DID YOU KEEP WORKING
   A) BECAUSE YOU THOUGHT IT WOULD HELP YOU IN SOME WAY
   B) BECAUSE YOU THOUGHT IT WOULD HELP THE LADY IN SOME WAY
   C) NEITHER OF THOSE TWO REASONS
5. WHY DID YOU KEEP WORKING AFTER THE LADY CAME BACK AND SAID SHE WOULD BE AWAY FOR A WHILE LONGER?
6. WHEN THE LADY CAME BACK AND SAID SHE WOULD BE AWAY FOR A WHILE LONGER, DID YOU KEEP WORKING
   A) BECAUSE YOU WANTED TO?
   B) BECAUSE SHE WANTED YOU TO?
   C) NEITHER OF THOSE TWO REASONS
7. WHEN THE LADY CAME BACK AND SAID SHE WOULD BE AWAY FOR A WHILE LONGER, DID YOU KEEP WORKING
   A) BECAUSE YOU THOUGHT THE LADY WOULD FIND OUT IF YOU WOULDN'T KEEP WORKING?
   B) BECAUSE YOU WANTED TO KEEP WORKING?
   C) NEITHER OF THOSE TWO REASONS
8. WHEN THE LADY CAME BACK AND SAID SHE WOULD BE AWAY FOR A WHILE LONGER, DID YOU KEEP WORKING
   A) BECAUSE YOU THOUGHT IT WOULD HELP YOU IN SOME WAY?
   B) BECAUSE YOU THOUGHT IT WOULD HELP THE LADY IN SOME WAY?
   C) NEITHER OF THOSE TWO REASONS
9. WHAT DID YOU LIKE DOING BETTER,
   A) TRACING?
   B) WATCHING THE TV?

Table 1

Mean Number of Seconds On Task As A Function of Task Purpose

Task Purpose	M
Learning Purpose	80.51
Performance Evaluation	100.05
No Purpose	86.32

Mean Number of Seconds On Task As A Function of Gender

Gender	M
Males	82.55
Females	95.40

Mean Number of Seconds On Task As A Function of Compliance Test

Compliance Test	M	SD
Experimenter Absent	101.47	38.26
Experimenter Absent + Disinhibition Statement	76.39	42.25

TABLE 2

MEAN NUMBER OF SECONDS WATCHING TV AS A FUNCTION OF TASK PURPOSE, GOAL SETTING STRATEGY, GENDER, AND COMPLIANCE TEST

CHILD SETS TASK GOALS	COMPLIANCE TEST: EXP. ABSENT M	EXP. ABSENT SD	EXP. ABSENT + DIS. ST. M	EXP. ABSENT + DIS. ST. SD
TASK PURPOSE				
LEARNING				
MALES	78.00	83.00	163.37	112.21
FEMALES	74.25	62.06	107.25	96.98
PERFORMANCE EVALUATION				
MALES	51.56	48.64	85.56	43.66
FEMALES	51.00	43.23	83.71	46.25
NO PURPOSE				
MALES	36.00	34.24	129.22	104.11
FEMALES	112.29	86.27	126.57	107.91
	M = 67.18		M = 115.95	

EXPERIMENTER SETS TASK GOALS	COMPLIANCE TEST: EXP. ABSENT M	EXP. ABSENT SD	EXP. ABSENT + DIS. ST. M	EXP. ABSENT + DIS. ST. SD
TASK PURPOSE				
LEARNING				
MALES	46.44	35.41	144.78	70.68
FEMALES	62.29	36.94	126.43	51.24
PERFORMANCE EVALUATION				
MALES	80.62	82.19	163.56	43.66
FEMALES	10.86	8.45	56.29	61.25
NO PURPOSE				
MALES	69.89	60.64	100.44	54.53
FEMALES	31.87	32.30	132.00	58.67
	M = 50.33		M = 120.58	

Table 3

Item Loadings on Factors 1, 2, 3, And 4

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Items loading on Factor 1				
1	.63	.16	.19	.44
2	.78	-.17	.05	.14
5	.73	.20	-.05	-.18
6	.80	.28	.05	-.01
Items loading on Factor 2				
4	.10	.77	.10	.23
8	.14	.87	.09	-.11
Items loading on Factor 3				
3	.10	.00	.81	.11
7	-.01	.17	.78	-.06
Item loading on Factor 4				
9	.01	.05	.00	.92